



USAID
DEL PUEBLO DE LOS ESTADOS
UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA

COLOMBIA

April 2008

FIRST PERSON

A woman with great taste

Liliam Mayini Macías is a renowned coffee cupper and found a new life thanks to USAID's alternative development program.



Photo credit: Juan Pablo Casto

“My life has changed since I joined the specialty coffee program. I realized that there is a career in coffee production and it is well paid”.

—Liliam Mayini Macías, USAID beneficiary

Liliam Mayini Macías is only 20 years old and she is an expert in specialty coffee. While other young women in vulnerable rural areas of Colombia are forced to work in illicit activities to earn an income, Liliam Mayini had the opportunity to be part of an alternative development project funded by USAID in the southern part of the department of Tolima. The specialty coffee program works with small coffee producers to reduce coca and poppy cultivation by increasing the production of exportable specialty coffees and, as a result, increasing their incomes.

Tolima had once been plagued by violence and coca but thanks to USAID assistance under Plan Colombia the small farmers have found in coffee growing an alternative to illicit crops. USAID, through this partnership program with the National Federation of Coffee Growers and implemented by the NGO ACDI/VOCA, has leveraged more than US\$8 million in private investment for coffee activities.

Under this program, Liliam Mayini received technical training in coffee tasting (“cupping”) and very soon proved to be a talented cupper. As a result of her advanced cupping abilities, she was able to travel to the United States for additional training with U.S. private sector specialty coffee companies in California and Vermont. Thanks to her expertise acquired through this training, Liliam Mayini is now a renowned coffee cupper and is responsible for quality control of the coffee produced by her community.

“My life has changed since I joined the specialty coffee program. I realized that there is a promising career in specialty coffee production and it is well paid. The training we have received is wonderful but more importantly, we have made great achievements as a community and as coffee growers”, she says.

But her goals are not limited to these achievements alone. Liliam recently moved to the city of Ibagué in the Department of Tolima, and she is now studying agronomy. During her spare time, she enjoys sharing her coffee knowledge with others. In 2006 and 2007 Liliam Mayini served as a judge in the National Barista Championship held in Bogotá and she evaluated the skills of the participants.

To date over 6,900 families have been benefited from the specialty coffee program and more than 2,000 hectares of illicit crops have been manually eradicated as a clear example of the ongoing social and economic transformation in Colombia.